



TEXAS ATTORNEY GENERAL'S COLONIA GEOGRAPHIC DATABASE

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

THE TERM "COLONIA" GENERALLY APPLIES to residential subdivisions near the U.S.-México border that lack legally mandated water or wastewater services.

Most colonias lie outside city limits or in isolated areas of a county. Residents of these substandard housing developments lack access to basic necessities such as drinking water, sewage treatment and paved roads.

Over the past 15 years, the Texas Legislature has worked to prevent unlawful colonia developments by reforming state laws and placing new requirements on border-area developers. The colonia prevention laws have four major thrusts:

- Requiring subdividers to provide basic infrastructure (water, sewer, roads and drainage) when they create or "plat" new residential developments;
- Restricting the advertising and selling of lots that are not platted or that lack water and sewer;
- Establishing standards governing connections to utilities in substandard areas;
- Mandating certain disclosures and protections when lots are sold through contracts for deeds.

The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) has enforcement responsibilities under several of these laws and has taken legal action to stop violations and remedy unlawful colonia developments. In addition, the OAG created and maintains an extensive Colonia Geographic Database for the border region.

The recently updated database stores accurate geographic and descriptive data on over 2,000 colonia areas in 31 border area counties. Maps and data from this database are viewable on the attorney general's Web site: www.texasattorneygeneral.gov.

Colonia geographic features displayed include the location, boundary and area of each colonia; roads serving the community; the internal road network; and water features and community resources, such as schools and parks. Satellite views of the colonia areas and adjoining terrain are also available. The database stores additional, non-geographic information collected by various state and local entities such as the Texas Water Development Board and the Texas Secretary of State's Colonia Program.

The database was created to:

- Help the OAG undertake its colonia prevention effort.
- Further authorities' understanding of the extent of colonias within Texas.
- Stimulate scrutiny of social and economic conditions within colonias.
- Provide data for colonia project funding proposals.
- Provide the basis for developing a registry of colonias suitable for listing as Census Designated Places (CDPs) so that better, more specific Census statistics are available for local government and colonia project planners.

Before purchasing residential property outside the city limits, border area purchasers should check with county officials to confirm that the property was legally subdivided and that the developer has made necessary arrangements to supply required water and wastewater facilities.

Texans along the Texas-México border can file complaints with the OAG against developers or sellers who fail to provide water or wastewater services or who subdivide land without first obtaining necessary county approval. Complaints can be filed on the attorney general's Web site or by calling (800) 252-8011.

POINTS TO REMEMBER



COLONIA GEOGRAPHIC DATABASE

The Colonia Geographic Database contains:

- Location, boundary and description of over 2,000 colonia areas in 31 border area counties
- roads serving the community
- internal road network
- water features and community resources

Access the database at the Border Colonias tab on the attorney general's Web site:

www.texasattorneygeneral.gov

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